

“Our Father”

Luke 11:1-13

Just like we had two weeks ago with the parable of the Good Samaritan, we have an underlying theme we could call “What we think we know about familiar words of Jesus.” I cannot think of words more familiar than the words of the Lord’s Prayer.

There is a danger when something is really familiar, we tend to pay less attention to it. When I pray the Lord’s Prayer here during worship, I read the text because my mind is apt to wander or I might spend that time during prayer thinking about what is coming next here in the Divine Service.

These are words worth focusing our attention upon. Jesus specifically tells His disciples, “When you pray, say” these words. No matter how tired I am, I can’t fall asleep at night without saying the Lord’s Prayer (along with the Invocation and Apostle’s Creed). But these words are not “magic.” Prayer is not magic. Prayer is not our attempt to manipulate God. Prayer is just “talking to God.” I say “just talking to God.” Think about what that means.

The Almighty God has invited you to bend His ear, and He has created this relationship so that when you do come to Him and pray, it is not as if you are part of some unknown random crowd and you register with your Social Security number for an audience with Him. Rather, you call Him Father, because you are His true child. Luther says that “with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

So He gives the disciples the Lord’s Prayer. And then Jesus says, “Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened

to you. . . What Father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead give him a snake; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

You like giving good gifts to your children, so does your Father in heaven. But you don't give your children everything they ask for (and for good reason), and neither does your Father in heaven. And unlike a sinful father like me, your Father in heaven always knows exactly what good things you need and exactly what obstacles and challenges you need so that His children develop perseverance and strength.

But we ask, what about the prayers that we offer to God which are dealing with specific and serious issues. We pray for a loved one who is sick, or injured, or dying – yet those we love still die. We pray for safety for ourselves and our children – yet tragedy strikes.

Why does God not answer all of these prayers in the way that we ask Him to? He certainly answers some of them. In the Old Testament, King Hezekiah was granted a 15 year extension on his life when he prayed to the Lord [Is. 38:1-5]. Martin Luther prayed vigorously as his young associate Philip Melanchthon was near death from an illness, and Philip's life was spared at that time.

Luther also prayed vigorously at the bedside of his 13 year old daughter Magdalena who died in his arms after a long illness. She was the second of Luther's children to die.

When we are faced with difficult situations, illnesses, family problems, or even the most devastating tragedies, pray to the Lord that those problems will be taken away (although certain events and conditions cannot be fixed this side of eternity). But pray – not because if we get enough people praying,

God will make the “storm of life” magically disappear. But, when faced with the “storm of life,” pray that the Lord gives you the strength of Spirit, the patience, the grace, and the comfort that only He can give.

Never doubt that the Lord hears your prayer. He is your Father, and He cares deeply for His children, and He often answers your prayers in the way you ask. However, sometimes that for which we pray is not beneficial in the long run and therefore is not God’s will. Remember that “the long run” has an eternal aspect. God is always looking out for your best interest “in the long run.” Therefore prayers for material or physical blessings, even physical healings are not prayers with the guarantee “ask and you shall receive” connected with them.

Remember St. Paul’s prayers as recorded in his second letter to the Corinthians; how Paul recalls that he pleaded with the Lord three times that He would take away his “thorn in the flesh.” But rather than relieving Paul of his difficulties, the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” [2 Cor. 12:9].

Rather than giving Paul physical aid, as he had asked, He gave him spiritual aid, which the Lord never withholds from His people. And those are the prayers to which the promise “Ask and you shall receive” is connected. When teaching us to pray, Jesus tells us that even sinful people like you and me know how to give good gifts to our children; Jesus says, “how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” When Jesus taught us to pray, He taught us to pray for an increase in the strength of our faith. He taught us to pray for the Holy Spirit to play a larger role in our lives.

We see this in the Lord’s Prayer. In that prayer, we pray that our Father’s name is hallowed. That is, we pray that God’s name remains holy in

our lives, that the Word of God is taught in truth and purity, and that God's Word and God's name is not profaned among us.

We pray that God's kingdom would come to us. God's kingdom comes when His Holy Spirit blesses us with God's Word and Sacraments, so that by His grace we believe God's holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity (as Luther says in the catechism). And the focus is really on eternity more than our brief experience with time. Ultimately, the coming of the Kingdom of God will be seen when Christ returns.

We pray that our Father's will, not our will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray "Give us this day our daily bread." This is the only petition of the Lord's Prayer that asks for any physical blessings.

Then the Lord teaches us to pray for forgiveness. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. We pray that our Father would forgive our sins even though we do not deserve to be forgiven. We ask that He would send His Holy Spirit into our hearts that we would have the grace and strength to sincerely forgive and gladly do good to everyone who sins against us – even though they do not deserve to be forgiven.

Finally, we pray that our Father would guard and keep us, so that through temptation we would not be deceived by Satan, the world, or our sinful nature; that He would rescue us from every evil during our life on earth, and when our last hour has come, that He would give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrows to Himself in heaven.

These are the things for which the Lord has taught us to pray. Christ has given us the promise that our Father in heaven will send His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Amen.